

How to increase your child's iron intake

Information for patients, parents and guardians

Iron is an important mineral, helping to make red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body. A lack of iron can lead to iron deficiency anaemia. This is a reduction in the number of red blood cells that can cause symptoms of tiredness, pale skin, headaches, lack of concentration and poor appetite.

Usually your baby has sufficient iron stores for the first six months of their life. After this time your child needs other foods containing iron in order to prevent anaemia. Infants should be given breast milk, formula or follow-on milk as their main drink until the age of one year. Ordinary cow's milk is a poor source of iron and should not be given as a drink until your child is at least one year old.

Iron is absorbed best from meat, fish and poultry (for example chicken). If possible, children should be offered a portion of meat or fish every day. If your child likes liver or kidney try to give this once a week. If your child does not eat meat, chicken, fish or eggs give them regular servings of non-meat sources of iron (see other sources of iron section). Growing up milk is a good source of iron.

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron. Include food or drink containing vitamin C with a meal (see good sources of vitamin C section).

Sources of iron

You should aim for your child to have a good source of iron at every meal. The foods in the list below are high in iron and should form a regular part of your child's diet:

- Red meat (such as beef, lamb, pork)
- Offal (such as kidneys, heart, liver)
- Beans (such as kidney, haricot, butter)
- Pulses (such as lentils, split peas)
- Oily fish (tinned and fresh)
- Eggs
- Fortified breakfast cereals and baby foods
- Growing up milk

Some foods, such as breakfast cereals, have iron added to them. This includes both the branded cereals and supermarket versions. Porridge oats and muesli type cereals tend not to have extra iron added to them. If in doubt check the nutritional label on the packaging.

	High	Low
Amount of iron per portion	5mg	<3mg
Amount of iron per 100g	8mg	<3mg

Meal ideas

The meal suggestions over the page offer ways to maximise the iron content of your meals, using everyday foods.

Breakfast ideas

- Fortified breakfast cereals with two dried apricots, plus half a glass of fruit juice
- Half a tin of baked beans on two slices of wholemeal toast, plus half a glass of fruit juice
- One sausage, beans and toast, plus half a glass of fruit juice
- Boiled egg and a slice of wholemeal toast, plus half a glass of fruit juice
- Half a kipper with one slice of bread, plus half a glass of fruit juice

Snack meal ideas

- Corned beef and tomato sandwich
- Lentil soup with toast
- Thick dhal with chapatti
- Tin of sardines/mackerel on two slices of toast
- Omelette with salad
- Hummus with crackers
- Jacket potato with beans

Main meal ideas

- Liver sausage and pasta bake
- Steak and kidney pie with potatoes and vegetables
- Chickpea and potato curry with rice/chapatti
- Liver and onion casserole with potatoes and vegetables
- Bean casserole with garlic bread
- Corned beef hash with baked beans
- Beef and vegetable stir fry with noodles
- Lasagne with salad
- Chilli con carne with rice
- Tofu and vegetable stir fry with rice

Snacks

- Dried fruit (for example apricots, prunes, raisins)
- Nuts* and peanut butter

* Whole nuts should not be given to children under five years of age as they can cause choking.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron. Include food or drink containing vitamin C with a meal.

Good sources of vitamin C

- Fruit, especially citrus, like oranges, tangerines and clementines
- Fruit juices and squash drinks with added vitamin C
- Salad vegetables, like tomato, pepper and watercress
- Lightly cooked (still crunchy) vegetables such as peas, carrots, broccoli, spinach and cauliflower

If you have any questions or concerns please contact

Southampton paediatric dietitians

D level, Southampton Children's Hospital

Telephone: 023 8120 6072

Email: dietetics@uhs.nhs.uk

You can find more information about having a healthy diet at this website:

www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood/Pages/goodfoodhome.aspx

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital